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January 3, 2008

Dear Mr. Campbell, and the Honorable Kathleen McDonald O'Malley,

My name is Frank Griffith. My sister, Sharon, is Evan's mother. I am a deeply committed father to four children and faithful husband for 18 years. I own six small businesses employing 30+ individuals with minority equity positions in three more. I have 20+ years in high technology experience in Silicon Valley where two of my companies went public on NASDAQ. My father is a decorated military officer buried in National Arlington Cemetery and he raised five children (Sharon, me and three others) to be givers not takers in society. My brother is a successful venture capitalist in Palo Alto and my sisters are professional musicians, doctors, and information technologists.

However, like Evan, for me it has not always been this way. And quite frankly, if it had not been for my family and especially Sharon and Ken Stern, Evan's parents, I don't know if I would have made it out of my own dark days during my early twenties.

I have known Evan since the day he was born. Four years after his birth and two years into my JD/MBA program, I was forced to cut my graduate work short. I was fired from my job, had legal issues, and hit rock bottom. I was 24. I had no where to go, no way to explain my predicament to future employers, no money, debt, and most of all my reputation was damaged. My closest family was Evan's Mom and Dad. So I moved to Shaker Heights.

I lived in the attic of my sister's home and began building a friendship with my little nephew named Evan. Seven days a week I lived with Evan and his parents. I spent endless hours babysitting and playing with Evan and his little sister Rachel. My sister was finishing up medical school and my brother-in-law had started up a business. Consequently, many evenings were spent with just Evan, Rachel, and me playing all night together, reading books, and spending precious last moments of the day putting them to bed.

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We played baseball in the backyard, I took him to his Saturday games, and watched endless hours of the same Superman movie over and over. He had the best toys in the world stacked up in their sun room. Evan often pulled me into that room and built the most magnificent buildings, bridges, and monsters out of more toys than I had ever seen in one place in my life. He was a happy, truly nice little boy.

I can't tell you enough how absolutely sweet and kind this little boy was, and what an impact he made on my life. I had never met any little boy this gentle. He did not have a mean bone in his body. My own childhood memories are of fighting my way to school and home, often surrounded by a dozen neighborhood children, as I fought some boy who made fun of my height, where I lived, or my family car.

I did not grow up as well off as our neighbors; I was the smallest boy in my class of 250. Always first in line as we processed into church. My youth was a fighting, tough one. There was no space or room in my life for kindness, even in those early years. But Evan showed me the richness of life beyond my tough experiences. Evan's joy and positive energy gave me life when I did not have much of my own. I envied him for being able to be that way. No, I watched him to learn how to be more sweet and nice myself. Evan encouraged my faith in Men who could be kind, generous, and nice; his joy helped me look past my personal problems. I believe those years with him has helped to make me the man and father I am today.

I met my wife during this same period. This allowed me to watch Janie interact with Evan as many a Friday and Saturday night we both babysat him and Rachel together. I knew his temperament, I observed his heart as he shared his thoughts and his time with Janie and me. He was vulnerable but smart. I think I understood his heart. And on it was written "I am kind and sweet."

Evan and I had a rare relationship. None of my other brothers and sisters has had such an intimate, friendly, and time-consuming relationship with any other nephew or niece like I have had with Evan.





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This season lasted for many years. By the time Evan hit high school he had left his Shaker and Bath, Ohio roots and moved to Doylestown, Ohio, a small, rural town where my father and mother had retired to. My father was dying and my sister, a doctor, wanted to be closer to help with the day to day needs. Once again, I saw my brother-in-law put family first and do whatever it took to help extended family.

During Evan's years in Doylestown, my own family began to grow. As a senior executive in Silicon Valley, I traveled extensively and spent my discretionary hours at home with my four home schooled children. Twice during these years my company went public on NASDAQ further intensifying my work load and pulling me away from my extended family and Evan.

But over time, I began to notice the joy and lightheartedness within Evan slowly slip away. And the lightness within his smile and gentle heart eventually turned dark. And by the time he was a senior the darkness turned black. When my family came to visit during holidays, Evan's darkness was palpable, his reticence grew stronger, and his alienation from family and conversation became almost extinct. An obligatory hello at the entrance as we arrived was all we saw of Evan and then he was off alone in his room, away from family and good conversation.

It broke my heart to see "My Evan" like this. I could handle the distance he put between us, but I wished my own little boys, who looked up to him, could have some of his time and get closer. I knew Evan had so much to give them. But Evan was running on empty. He was obviously hurt and in great pain. I tried to reach out to him but he would not let me in. Perhaps Evan saw me now as his narrow minded Uncle who actually believed in God and church.

When Evan called me the day the FBI came to his college apartment and explained to me what happened, I then realized that Evan wasn't distant from me and my family all these years, but his guilt had caused him to withdraw from everyone. It wasn't his dislike of us, but his dislike of himself that pushed him away.





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Within days Evan came to my home and we spent hours talking. As we talked it became clear to me that Evan's tears were truly a reflection of his "sense of relief" that this thing is now out in the open and he can finally get the help he has wanted for years. He was deeply sorry and ashamed and cried out for help. He was forthright and open with me as he shared his story, holding nothing back. It was if he wanted me to know everything so he didn't have to carry this animal on his back, alone, anymore. It was crushing his mind and spirit. He cried out for help. He wanted my help, our help, and he was willing to be as naked as he needed to be to get it.

The intensity of his emotions were more a sense of relief – freedom – that he felt from the bondage he had been under; and now, being caught, in a weird way, he actually felt set free. Sure, his actions had been exposed; his shame was palpable; his fiancé left him; his degree ceased; his relationships were devastated; and he had legitimate concern and fear of the forthcoming consequences. But he was so sorry for what he had done, and wanted help. Getting caught actually helped remove the weight off his shoulders and mind enabling him to receive help, counseling, forgiveness, and love. He found new strength in knowing he was not alone any longer; he didn't have to fight by himself, but he had family and an inner spiritual strength that he could rely on, that was more than him, bigger than him, and more capable than him. He was anxious to find this new life, free from his dark past.

For more than a year Evan began visiting my home every Wednesday after his counseling sessions and again on Sunday evenings. Since we home school our children we joyfully changed our academic schedule creating room in our home for him. Evan played with my four children, two boys and two girls. Many times he spent the day teaching them science and math. Other days he would take them out to lunch, go to movies, the library, or play in the backyard. And he rarely left without spending an hour or so with me talking privately. He would come back on Sunday afternoon's and take my boys to an evening youth service across town.

The Evan I knew when he was 5, was slowly coming back. Month after month a lightness returned to his step, a smile on his face, a softness in his smile. He was open and engaging, quick witted, and always gentle in his relationships. He even began joking and clowning around as time moved on. It had been a decade since I had seen this side of Evan.





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My kids just loved having him around, hanging out, and doing many things together. They saw and embraced the new Evan. They were so thankful to have a cousin who was truly interested in them, who was positive, and upbeat, and anxious to spend time with them.

Though hidden from my children during these two years of weekly visits, Evan, as one could imagine, had sad and down moments. At those times he would call and we would talk. And I asked him hard questions, holding him accountable. But in general the kind, sweet, nice, and gentle young boy I knew many a year ago, was just that again, but now as a young man.

Evan went back to complete school and secured a quality, very high paying software engineering job. He continued to visit, talk, and nurture his relationships with my kids. He also continued going to church, cultivating new friends, and remaining faithful to his counseling sessions.

This past Thanksgiving my family went to Evan's home. And like the last two visits, Evan hung out with the family the entire day. We were all together, talking, playing games, and catching up on his life in Chicago. Evan was a new man. Just as when I was 24 and moved into Sharon's attic and am now successfully on my own, so too is Evan, only it didn't take him as long as it did me.

The little boy I once knew was now in a Man's body with a Man's mind, but ever-so-present was his gentleness and kind spirit.

Evan had come full circle for me. I am overjoyed.

I hope this letter helps paint a little picture of what I know and believe about Evan. And the picture being painted right now by Evan will only be harmed if interrupted by jail. Jail will only cause the paint to fade, the picture to dull, the frame to crack, and halt the beautiful art that Evan has been masterfully creating these past few years.





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He has dramatically changed his entire life around in these short few years; he is a huge asset to our family, his company, and his community. Like his parents, he will be a leader in his field, a giver not a taker, and a value add.

I pray for mercy. I thank you for taking time to get to know Evan better.

Sincerely and With Deep Respect,

Frank Griffith  
Evan's Uncle

